

## Creating a Personalized Sailing Fitness Plan

### Andrew Nelson

Conditioning and fitness are a huge component of dinghy sailing, and big boat sailing too. Dinghy sailors are athletes, and just like any other athlete training and conditioning are critical to success at the top level. Strength, balance, and endurance are key to making the boat go fast. Core, leg, arm, back, and mental strength are all important, but I think most top sailors will tell you that strong legs are the secret to a fast boat. When planning a sailing conditioning routine you have to take a full body approach and work your way around most parts of the weight room to be truly effective. Below is a sample of my weekly workout. It's important to alternate days, to give big muscle groups a break once and a while, and also to break down a workout into manageable goals. That being said you should still try to work cardio, stretching, and core into every workout.

**Upper Body/Core:** Rowing Machine (5 Mins each arm, then 10 Mins both arms), Stretching 15 mins, Lat Pulls 3x12, Upright Rows 3x12, Triceps Extensions 3x12, Bicep Curls 3x12, Shoulder Shrugs 3x12, Hanging Knee Raises 3x15, Hiking Bench (full extension/touch toes) 3x20, Planks 3 x 2min.

**Legs/Core:** Elliptical Treadmill\* (Cardio) 30 mins, Stretching 15 mins., Leg Press/Squats 3x10 (light), Leg Extensions 3x10, Box Jumps 3x12, Lunges w/30lbs weights in each hand (3 x 75 ft.), Hiking bench (full extension/touch toes) 3x20 Hanging Knee Raises 3x15

**Heavy Day:** Cycling (30 Mins), Stretching 15 mins, Bench Press (Start high and go for burnout, decreasing weight as you progress through sets... approx. 5-6 sets.) Squats (heavy- do reps of 10 alternating with bench reps. )

\*Running is hard on your joints, especially as you get older or heavier. Elliptical machines and stationary bikes are great because they offer high resistance and low impact settings. Rowing is also a great cardio substitute for running.

The above workout looks a lot different than it did when I was trying to fit in an FJ during my college years. This regimen focuses much more on strength, and less on cardio/weight loss. I did a lot of running and cardio in college, but never managed to get below 195lbs. Now that I'm sailing the Finn I'm not worried about weight, I'm worried about strength. In fact weight is a good thing in the Finn, but it's also important to put it on in the right places. Ideally you could gain weight in your head by working out your brain, but you can't. Carrying weight higher on your frame allows you to put it to work when you hike out. Bench press is something I've incorporated a lot more into my workout, because it builds muscle and adds weight higher on your torso. Men have a bit of an anatomical advantage vs. women in this category, since men are more upside down triangle shaped, while women are more pear shaped and have a lower center of gravity. That doesn't mean that women can't keep up with men, it just means they have to hike harder! It should also be noted that you should taper your workout leading up to a big regatta. Do shortened workouts or focus primarily on cardio leading up to an event. The last

thing you want is to be worn out from a hard week at the gym before the regatta even starts. It's not an excuse to lounge around the house all week, just don't push too hard.

You can do most of the exercises listed above at your local YMCA or perhaps even your school gym, but it does take time and you may have to improvise here and there depending on what equipment is available to you. If you don't own a hiking bench they are easy and cheap to make. Getting creative helps too, if you are looking to simulate hiking at the gym, try facing upwards on the bench typically used for back extensions. It's not a perfect solution but it targets the same muscle groups. On your off-days still make a point of getting some physical activity. Ideally that means sailing on your off days, but cycling, skiing, or even walking your dog is better than nothing. With the hours you'll spend in the gym it's important to try to kill two birds with one stone when possible. Also, and it may seem obvious, but sailing really is the best way to get in better sailing shape. That means practicing seriously, going through every tack like it is important and pushing yourself on those windy-day tack on the whistle drills. Joe Duplin, former Star class champion and Tufts sailing coach, sums it up nicely, "You're sailing upwind and your legs are burning. Think of how the poor guy who hasn't been working out must feel." Keep that in mind next time you're at the gym and then think about how many windy races are won or lost by inches at the finish line.

It should also be noted that you should taper your workout leading up to a big regatta. Do shortened workouts or focus primarily on cardio leading up to an event. The last thing you want is to be worn out from a hard week at the gym before the regatta even starts. It's not an excuse to lounge around the house all week, just don't push too hard.

When you consider that top sailors possess outstanding endurance, full body physical fitness, and the grace of a ballerina it is easy to shoot down ignorant statements like, "Sailors aren't real athletes." In fact sailors, especially in hiking boats, burn nearly as many calories a day as Olympic cyclists during the course of competition. Eating like an athlete is just as important as training like one. You are what you eat, so stay away from sugar and processed foods. Eat plenty of complex carbs, veggies, and protein. Fish, eggs, and chicken are great protein sources and low in fat. On regatta days eat plenty of carbs the day before, get a good sleep, and then eat lots of small snacks during the course of racing. Apples, whole grain bagels, cliff bars, and peanut butter are great fuel for your body. Keeping up your electrolytes and staying hydrated is also important for proper muscle function. I usually put diluted Gatorade (about 50/50 Gatorade to water ratio) in my water bottles if it's hot outside and just water when it's a cold day. Although I might not feel like it, I force myself to drink a little (not too much) in between races and get a snack.

Fitness doesn't happen overnight, so take advantage of the "off season" and winter months to get in shape for summer when it really starts blowing. Not only will you look and feel better, but you'll also notice a big improvement in your sailing.